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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LAGOS 000099

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREF NI
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: NEW BAKASSI LOCAL GOVERNMENT: WHERE ARE
THE DISPLACED PERSONS?

REF: A. 08LAGOS358
¶B. 08LAGOS243

Classified By: CONSUL GENERAL DONNA BLAIR FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶11. (C) Summary: During a January 12-14 trip to Cross River State, Poloffs, visit to the New Bakassi Local Government Area indicated that most, if not all, of the Nigerian citizen Bakassi residents who returned to Nigeria were temporarily housed for one to two months, and then sent away to other states of the South or back to Bakassi with little support or infrastructure to distribute aid for resettlement. There has been no accountability for nearly USD 13 million in federal funds for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and it appears that the New Bakassi Local Government (none of whom appeared to be former residents of the Bakassi peninsula) may have profited from the aid funds. It is unclear whether housing ostensibly built for IDPs will in fact be allocated to them, or when. The Governor recently requested additional aid for the Bakassi IDPs, although there is no evidence of any ongoing resettlement projects. End comment.

¶12. (C) During a January 12-14 visit to Cross River State, Poloffs traveled to the New Bakassi Local Government Area (NBLGA) where thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) had been temporarily housed following the final implementation of the Green Tree Agreement between Nigeria and Cameroon on August 14, 2008. Poloffs visited the resettlement center and new housing for internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Bakassi but were unable to find any evidence of the alleged thousands of IDPs still awaiting resettlement. Local government officials are now using the IDP camp as their offices and claimed that over 3,000 IDPs had willingly returned to their places of origin in Cross River, neighboring states, and on the Bakassi peninsula.

¶13. (SBU) On a previous trip in August 2008, Poloff observed a secondary school that was being used as an IDP camp, which housed in a very small space, approximately 2,000 to 3,000 IDPs, all of whom slept on the bare cement floors of the classrooms. Representatives of the Bakassi IDPs told Poloff that they hoped to be resettled to their states of origin, the states from which they had migrated to Bakassi, including Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, and Akwa Ibom (Ref A).

IDP Center Transformed Into LGA Offices

¶14. (C) Upon return to this location less than five months later, Poloffs found no trace of Bakassi IDPs living in the

area. Poloffs spoke with the Deputy Chairman and the Director of Security for the New Bakassi Local Government Council (NBLGC), whose offices now occupy the secondary school that had been used as an IDP camp. The floors had been carpeted and there were lights, fans, air conditioning systems, and offices furnished with new leather furniture. The LGA officials told Poloffs that these new offices were only temporary, as their new local government office building was still under construction. Poloffs also noticed new vehicles on the compound. Some vehicles were painted with the LGA's logo but several new luxury vehicles were also prominently displayed.

How Many IDPs?

¶ 15. (C) According to Vincent Aquah, Executive Secretary of Cross River State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA), of the 3,855 people who arrived in Cross River from Bakassi, 2,800 had roots in other south-south states including Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, and Akwa Ibom, while 1,055 had roots in Cross River State. Local government officials told Poloffs on January 13 that over 3,000 IDPs had willingly returned to their places of origin in Cross River, neighboring states, and on the Bakassi Peninsula.

The Resettlement Process

¶ 16. (C) Aquah told Poloffs that SEMA ensured adequate living facilities for the IDPs while in the camps. SEMA has not

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done any subsequent monitoring of the IDPs because they had all been resettled to their respective states within three months of their arrival, Aquah said. Similarly, Cordelia Ebiringa, the Officer in Charge of Anti-Human Trafficking for the Nigeria Immigration Service in Cross River, told Poloffs on January 13 that after several trips to the camps she discovered no Cross River native IDPs anywhere; they had all moved back to their homes.

¶ 17. (C) The NBLGC described how it had facilitated the return of the IDPs to their home states with the assistance of the Federal Government's Bakassi Resettlement Committee, which controlled the federal funds for IDP resettlement. The NBLGA also claimed that there were 2,000 IDPs remaining in Cross River for which the Federal Government continues to channel funds. These IDPs have dispersed, according to the officials, but will return to take possession of homes allegedly being prepared for them.

New Homes for IDPs?

¶ 18. (C) Poloffs visited the large new compound where a reported 400 new homes have been built to house the IDPs who remained in Cross River. The compound had been completed in August 2008, but by January was not yet connected to power or water, and there were no roads leading into or around the community. The NBLGA officials claimed the houses were unoccupied because of delays occasioned by a contractor's failure to meet the terms of a contract, and that the waiting IDPs had been sent away and would be contacted when the homes were ready. The deputy chairman of NBLGA said they had planned the commissioning of the homes on January 9 and all 2,000 of the Cross River IDPs came, but that the commissioning was cancelled at the last minute.

Follow the Money

¶ 19. (C) According to SEMA, when the IDPs relocated to other states of the South, all adults were given 10,000 naira (approximately USD 70) by the NBLGA. (Note: If 10,000 naira had been given to 2,800 adults, a total of 28 million naira,

or USD 180,000 would have been disbursed) Although Aquah claims not to know the exact amount available for the resettlement of the IDPs, the media reports that the federal government allocated 2 billion naira (USD 13 million) for the Bakassi IDPs. Aquah noted that SEMA was given a very limited role in the resettlement process and has not received any part of the two billion naira allocated for resettlement. Aquah indicated that most resources have been channeled through the NBLGA. The NBLGA in turn told Poloffs that the Federal Government's Bakassi Resettlement Committee controlled the federal funds for IDP resettlement.

Imoke Claims Many Still Displaced; Funds Inadequate

¶10. (SBU) On February 7, news articles reported that Cross River Governor Liyel Imoke (PDP) complained at the lack of assistance from the international community in resettling the Bakassi IDPs. Imoke requested that the United Nations and international donor agencies give more aid, as Cross River State was bearing the brunt of resettling "thousands" of IDPs. In regards to the two billion naira already expended, he said that he would set up a committee to ascertain where it has gone. In another press interview, Sadiq Marafa Diggi, the Director General of the Nigerian Boundary Commission said that while that the Commission is aware that over one billion naira (approximately USD 7 million) has gone missing, the public should &forget about the money⁸ and focus on the happiness of the IDPs. Recent newspaper articles also indicate that Cross River State Government is requesting aid to assist with a worsening security situation due to the influx of thousands of IDPs who remain displaced within the state, and to security threats seeping from the Bakassi peninsula.

¶11. (C) Comment: Poloffs, visit to the NBLGA indicated that most, if not all of the Nigerian Bakassi IDPs had been sent away with little support from federal, state or local

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governments. There are contradictions in the roles that various government entities say they played and no accountability for nearly USD 13 million in federal funds allocated for IDP relief. The New Bakassi Local Government Area, with newly outfitted offices in the former IDP camp, a new permanent office under construction, and new vehicles, may have profited from aid funds from the Federal Government.

It remains to be seen whether the remaining IDPs will benefit from the newly constructed housing. The Governor's requests for additional aid are troubling, as there is no evidence of any resettlement projects, and of the USD 13 million in federal funds, only USD 180,000 would appear clearly to have benefited the IDPs. End comment.

¶12. (U) This cable has been coordinated with Embassy Abuja.
BLAIR